

HIV and AIDS Awareness and Education Poster Project: A Study in Participatory Graphic Design

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Full paper to be distributed at conference registration.

ABSTRACT

The project described here was motivated by the need to produce two poster series addressing the prevention of HIV infection, by general questions of how to create effective messages for specific audiences, and by a larger concern with the role of graphics design in social change. The posters were intended to educate high school and college age students about HIV and AIDS, and thus needed to deal with sexuality and related issues through the particular values and experiences of today's diverse teenagers. The author, a graphics designer, was at a different stage of personal development than her audience (with different life experiences), and thus felt the need to involve the teens directly in her design work. A further issue was that neither she nor the teenagers had a thorough knowledge of HIV and AIDS. For these reasons, the author adopted a three part model including audience, designer, and topic expert in AIDS.

The initial phases of the project involved two groups of students — one in high school and one in college — as

well as an AIDS education expert. In meeting together, the students reacted both to information about disease transmission and to existing posters; both groups designed new posters, though in different ways. (The paper includes examples of existing posters and those designed by the students.) These sessions set up the interaction needed to understand the process of translation between topic and audience. For the author, the students' participation allowed the creation of information media that communicated using the language and imagery of the target communities as well as involving the audience actively in the process of communication.

Future project directions include working more with ethnically mixed groups and designing a program for/with students of color. The author has adopted participatory design sessions as a way to create relevant, honest messages for specific audiences that include information, experiences and expertise outside the designer's own.

In *PDC'94: Proceedings of the Participatory Design Conference*. R. Trigg, S.I. Anderson, and E.A. Dykstra-Erickson (Eds.). Chapel Hill NC USA, 27-28 October 1994. Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility, P.O. Box 717, Palo Alto CA 94302-0717 USA, cpsr@cpsr.org.